



A Teacher Guide

for

The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen's Guild Dramatic Society's Production of A Christmas Carol

By David McGillivray and Walter Zerlin Jr.

Welcome to Taproot Theatre Company and our Student Matinee Program. We are thrilled that you have decided to join us in educating students through theatre. In this Teacher Guide you will find useful materials to help prepare your students to see *The Farndale Avenue/Christmas Carol*. Thank you for choosing Taproot and we look forward to seeing you at the performance!

The Farndale Avenue/Christmas Carol Student Study Guide

A complimentary and companion study guide for students is available on Taproot Theatre's website, www.taproottheatre.org/StudentMatinees.htm. The Student Study Guide includes even more historical information surrounding the play, production information, as well as playwright and casting information.

Taproot encourages making copies and distributing the study guides to your class.

Preview *The Farndale Avenue/Christmas Carol* at Taproot Theatre

If you are interested in previewing the show before the student matinee performance you are welcomed to do so. Please contact Darrell Olson, (206) 529-3668, or darrell@taproottheatre.org for a pair of complimentary preview tickets.

Preview Opportunities

Nov. 16 th and 17 th	7:30pm, Preview Performance
Nov. 24	2:00pm, Saturday Performance
Nov. 24	8:00pm, Saturday Performance

Driving Directions to Taproot Theatre Company

From I-5 Take the N. 85th St. exit. Go west on N. 85th for about 2 miles, crossing Aurora Ave. N. and Greenwood Ave. N. The theatre is ½ block west of Greenwood Ave. N. at **204 N. 85th St.**

Bus Parking

Heading west on 85th, take the first right past Taproot Theatre (**204 N. 85th St.**) and then a left into the large parking lot behind Bartell's.

About the Play

Play Synopsis

When the ladies of the Farndale Dramatic Society get their hands on A Christmas Carol, anything can happen, and does. Missing actors, an appearance by Santa and audience participation make it a night audience members will never forget! This hilarious play-within-a-play brings a comedic twist to the beloved Dickens classic.

ALYSON, LORRIE AND LARRY

Cast

Larry Albert	Gordon
Alyson Banner	Thelma
Lorrie Fargo	Mercedes
Shellie Shulkin	Mrs. Reece
Bethany Wallace	Felicity



Setting: The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen's Community Center

COSTUME DESIGN BY SARAH GORDON

Mercedes as Bob Cratchit



Director
Sound/Scenic Designer
Costume Design
Production Stage Manager
Lighting Designer
Props Master
Dramaturg
Assistant Director
ASM
Dresser
Sound Board Operator
Dialect Coach

Production Team

Scott Nolte
Mark Lund
Sarah Gordon
Rebecca Olson
Jody Briggs
Jodi A. Sauerbier
Morgan Aldrich
Laura Bannister
Jenn Fjstone
Katie Tibbits
Dustin Morache
Nikki Visel

Charles Dickens

<http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/christmascarol/>



photo from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Dickens

Charles Dickens was born on February 7, 1812, and spent the first nine years of his life living in the coastal regions of Kent, a county in southeast England. Dickens' father, John, was a kind and likable man, but he was financially irresponsible, piling up tremendous debts throughout his life. When Dickens was nine, his family moved to London. At twelve, his father was arrested and sent to debtors' prison. Dickens' mother moved seven of their children into prison with their father but arranged for Charles to live alone outside the prison, working with other child laborers at a hellish job pasting labels on bottles in a blacking warehouse.

The three months Charles spent apart from his family were severely traumatic. He viewed his job as a miserable trap--he considered himself too good for it, stirring the contempt of his worker-companions.

After his father was released from prison, Dickens returned to school, eventually becoming a law clerk. He went on to serve as a court reporter before taking his place as one of the most popular English novelists of his time. At age 25, Dickens completed his first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*, which met with great success. This started his career as an English literary celebrity, during which he produced such masterpieces as *Great Expectations*, *David Copperfield*, and *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Dickens' beloved novella *A Christmas Carol* was written in 1843, with the intention of drawing readers' attention to the plight of England's poor. (Social criticism, a recurring theme in Dickens' work, resounds most strongly in his novel *Hard Times*.) In the tale, Dickens stealthily combines a somewhat indirect description of hardships faced by the poor with a heart-rending, sentimental celebration of the Christmas season. The calloused character of the apathetic penny-pinching Ebenezer Scrooge, who opens his heart after being confronted by three spirits, remains one of Dickens' most widely recognized and popular creations.

A Christmas Carol takes the form of a relatively simplistic allegory--it is seldom considered one of Dickens' important literary contributions. The novella's emotional depth, brilliant narration, and endearing characters, however, offer plenty of rewards for literature students, Dickensian fans, and Grinches alike. Like *A Tale of Two Cities*, *A Christmas Carol* has won much appreciation among general readers despite being dismissed by scholarly critics of Dickens' work.

A Christmas Carol

<http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/christmascarol/>

A Christmas Carol is a fairly straightforward allegory built on an episodic narrative structure in which each of the main passages has a fixed, obvious symbolic meaning. The book is divided into five sections (Dickens labels them Staves in reference to the musical notation staff--a Christmas carol, after all, is a song), with each of the middle three Staves revolving around a visitation by one of the three famous spirits. The three spirit-guides, along with each of their tales, carry out a thematic function--the Ghost of Christmas Past, with his glowing head, represents memory; the Ghost of Christmas Present represents charity, empathy, and the Christmas spirit; and the reaper-like Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come represents the fear of death. Scrooge, with his Bah! Humbug! attitude, embodies all that dampens Christmas spirit--greed, selfishness,

indifference, and a lack of consideration for one's fellow man.

With *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens hopes to illustrate how self-serving, insensitive people can be converted into charitable, caring, and socially conscious members of society through the intercession of moralizing quasi-religious lessons.

With each Ghost's tale functioning as a parable, *A Christmas Carol* advances the Christian moral ideals associated with Christmas--generosity, kindness, and universal love for your community--and of Victorian England in general.

The book also contains a political edge, most evident in Dickens' development of the bustling, struggling Cratchit family, who are a compelling, if one-dimensional, representation of the plight of the poor. Dickens, with every intention of tugging on your heartstrings, paints the Cratchit's as a destitute family that finds a way to express profound gratitude for its emotional riches.

Themes

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Christmas_Carol

The story deals extensively with two of Dickens' recurrent themes, social injustice and poverty, the relationship between the two, and their causes and effects.

The Victorian Era

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victorian_Era

The Victorian era of the United Kingdom marked the height of the British Industrial Revolution and the apex of the British Empire and is commonly used to refer to the period of Queen Victoria's rule between 1837 and 1901.

Notable works by Charles Dickens

Charles Dickens published over a dozen major novels, a large number of short stories (including a number of Christmas-themed stories), a handful of plays, and several nonfiction books. Dickens's novels were initially serialized in weekly and monthly magazines, then reprinted in standard book formats.

Novels

- *The Pickwick Papers* (Monthly serial, April 1836 to November 1837)^[9]
 - *The Adventures of Oliver Twist* (Monthly serial in *Bentley's Miscellany*, February 1837 to April 1839)
 - The Christmas books:
 - A Christmas Carol* (1843)
 - The Chimes* (1844)
 - The Cricket on the Hearth* (1845)
 - The Battle of Life* (1846)
 - The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain* (1848)
- David Copperfield* (Monthly serial, May 1849 to November 1850)
 - Bleak House* (Monthly serial, March 1852 to September 1853)
 - A Tale of Two Cities* (Weekly serial in *All the Year Round*, April 30, 1859, to November 26, 1859)
 - Great Expectations* (Weekly serial in *All the Year Round*, December 1, 1860 to August 3, 1861)

Short story collections

Sketches by Boz (1836)

Boots at the Holly-tree Inn: And Other Stories (1858)

Reprinted Pieces (1861)

The Haunted House (1862) (with Wilkie Collins, Elizabeth Gaskell, Adelaide Proctor, George Sala and Hesba Setton)

The Mudfog Papers (1880) aka *Mudfog and Other Sketches*

To Be Read At Dusk (1898)

Selected nonfiction, poetry, and plays

The Village Coquettes (Plays, 1836)

The Fine Old English Gentleman (poetry, 1841)

American Notes (1842)

Pictures from Italy (1846)

The Life of Our Lord: As written for his children (1849)

A Child's History of England (1853)

The Frozen Deep (play, 1857)

Speeches, Letters and Sayings (1870)

The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen's Guild Dramatic Society's Production of *A Christmas Carol*.

David McGillivray and Walter Zerlin, Jr. have written many plays in the Farndale series. Zerlin's mother was the inspiration for the Farndale concept: "My mother had been in her drama group for years," he has said. "I always remember seeing her in shows with women playing men's parts, and doing it dreadfully. But throughout it all was the fun and drive they had, no matter what problem beset them." After seeing one of his mother's performances, Zerlin with McGillivray concocted *The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen's Guild Dramatic Society's Production of Macbeth*. That show premiered at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 1976 and launched the pair on a long relationship with the Farndale ladies.

So what do the fictional Farndale women do? They put on shows. Badly. Very badly. They are the prime example of what makes for horribly, bad theatre. And there are many elements which must work together in artistic, and fatalistic unison which make for bad theatre. Foremost is bad acting, and then there's a bad set design which follows a bad costume design which get lit by horrible lighting which also helps to show the tremendously bad props and other furniture pieces onstage. The Farndale women, get it all right, er. . . .wrong. ☺

Notable Works by David McGillivray and Walter Zerlin Jr.

From <http://www.colonytheatre.org/shows/FarndaleAvenueHousing.html>

1976, *The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen's Guild Dramatic Society's Production of Macbeth*

1978, *The Farndale Follies*

1980, *The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen's Guild Dramatic Society Murder Mystery*

1982, *Chase Me Up Farndale Avenue, Si'l Vous Plait*

1984, *The Haunted Through Lounge and Recessed Dining Nook at Farndale Castle*

1986, *The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen's Guild Dramatic Society Murder Mystery (Revised)*

1987, *They Came From Mars and Landed Outside the Farndale Avenue Church Hall in Time for the Townswomen's Guild's Coffee Morning*

1988, *The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen's Guild Dramatic Society's Production of A Christmas Carol*

1990, *We Found Love and an Exquisite Set of Porcelain Figurines aboard the S.S. Farndale Avenue*

1991, *The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen's Guild Operatic Society's Production of The Mikado*



By attending Taproot Theatre's production of *The Farndale Avenue/Christmas Carol*, having a pre-performance classroom visit, using the study guide and actively engaging in the pre and post show activities your students can begin to fulfill the following EALR's.

Arts

1. The student understands and applies arts knowledge and skills
 - 1.1 Understand arts concepts and vocabulary
 - 1.2 Develop arts skills and techniques
 - 1.3 Apply audience skills in a variety of arts settings and performances
 - 1.4 Apply audience skills in a variety of arts settings and performances.
2. The student demonstrates thinking skills using artistic processes.
 - 2.1 Apply a creative process in the arts: **Reflect** for the purpose of elaboration and self evaluation.
 - 2.3 Apply a responding process to an arts presentation
 - Engage** actively and purposefully
 - Describe** what is seen and/or heard
 - Analyze** how the elements are arranged and organized
 - Interpret** based on descriptive properties
 - Evaluate** using supportive evidence and criteria
4. The student makes connections within and across the arts to other disciplines, life, cultures, and work.
 - 4.1 Demonstrate and analyze connections among the arts disciplines
 - 4.3 Understand how arts impact lifelong choices
 - 4.4 Understand that the arts shape and reflect culture and history.
 - 4.5 Demonstrate the knowledge of arts careers and the knowledge of arts skills in the world.

Communication

1. The student uses listening and observation skills to gain understanding.
 - 1.1 Focus attention
 - 1.2 Listen and observe to gain and interpret information.
 - 1.3 Check for understanding by asking questions and paraphrasing
3. The student uses communication strategies and skills to work effectively with others.
 - 3.1 Use language to interact effectively and responsibly with others
 - 3.2 Work cooperatively as a member of a group
 - 3.3 Seek agreement and solutions through discussion

Writing

1. The student writes clearly and effectively
 - 1.1 Develop concept and design. Develop a topic or theme; organize written thoughts with a clear beginning, middle, and end; use transitional sentences and phrases to connect related ideas; write coherently and effectively
 - 1.2 Use style appropriate to the audience and purpose. Use voice, word choice, and sentence fluency for intended style and audience
 - 1.3 Apply writing conventions. Know and apply correct spelling, grammar, sentence structure, punctuation, and capitalization

Pre-show Activities

- 1) Have students think about their expectations for seeing a live performance. Ask them to write down three of their expectations and share it with two or three other people. Ask the groups to talk about why they have those expectations and why it is important to them.
- 2) Give students time in the library to research Charles Dickens and the Victorian Era. Ask them to find some of the aspects and elements that create the style of the Victorian Era, i.e. social class rules, manners, social expectations etc. and discuss the impact of each item.
- 3) Have them research famous British comedy shows. Some of the most popular are Monty Python, Mr. Bean, Fawlty Towers, and Benny Hill. How is British humor different from American Humor?

Post-show Activities

- 1) Class Discussion Topics
 - a. What impressions were created by your first view of the set? What expectations did you form about the play's tone as you listened to the music before the performance started?
 - b. What about the production surprised or impressed you?
 - c. Were the actors believable in their roles?
 - d. What do you think would happen next if the play were to continue?
 - e. The characters keep performing *A Christmas Carol* although many things go wrong throughout the show. Have you ever been involved in an event where everything seemed to go wrong?
 - f. One of the funny elements of this show is that the costumes don't really match the time period. Have you ever been to an event where somebody didn't dress properly?
 - g. What was the purpose of doing a production like this? Did you learn anything from the production?
- 2) Have the students think back to the expectations they wrote down before they came to see the production. With the same groups ask them to share those again and then talk about whether or not their expectations were met when they saw the production. Ask them to think about why they were or were not met and if that influenced whether or not they liked the production.
- 3) Have students write a critique of the production. Encourage them to be specific about their likes and dislikes, and their reasons for each. Help them to understand the differences between critiquing the play (text, storyline, character development) and the production (acting, lighting, directing, sound, set, costumes).
- 4) Have students read a newspaper review of the production. Ask them to write two paragraphs explaining why they agree or disagree with the newspaper review. Encourage them to use specific examples from the play and quotes from the newspaper article to support their argument.
- 5) Frames are frozen pictures that students make with their bodies. Divide students into groups of four or five and give them 15 minutes to come up with five frames from the play and a title for each one. There should be no talking or movement.
 - a. They should pick the five most important points of the story so if someone who had not seen the play saw their frames, they would be able to understand what happens.
 - b. Ask students to assign one person in their group to say the title of each frame as they work on their interpretation.
 - c. When time is up have students show their frames to the whole class.
 - d. Allow the students that are watching to ask questions of the performing group at the end of their frames. Encourage them to ask a question about something that wasn't clear.
 - e. Groups can then redo a frame to clarify the picture.

Theatre Games

What Are You Doing? (Purpose: Concentration and responding quickly)

Actor 1 begins an action, (eg: jumping rope). Actor 2 says, "What are you doing?" Actor 1 says something OTHER than jumping rope (e.g. "Building a bird house.") Improviser 2 begins miming the action that Actor 1 stated, i.e. building a bird house. Actor 1 asks 2, "What are you doing." And he responds with anything except "building a birdhouse". Actor 1 then mimes the action that Actor 2 suggested and so on. The faster you can respond and create the action the better.

Playbook (Purpose: To work together to help justify random and crazy dialogue into a scene)

One of the actors on stage is given a script and a page number. That actor must take all of *their* dialogue from that play, beginning on the assigned page. Teammates work to justify the dialogue and to keep the story moving and progressing. The tendency is to eventually treat the person holding book as if they are insane, so try not to.



**Costume Design By:
Sarah Gordon**

Left:
Mrs. Reece as Tiny Tim

Right:
Gordon as Marley



Objectionable Material

Please remember that you're the best judge of what's appropriate for your students. On this page you'll find a thorough account of everything in the script which might be found to be objectionable to students and adults. If you have questions about the content of the script please read it, don't rely 100% on this page or what you've been told about the show. If you would like a perusal script (copy of the play) just call Darrell at 206-529-3668, or email him at darrell@taproottheatre.org.

- This is a British show, so there's a lot of British humor, most of which will be understood, but some of it is a little ambiguous.
- There are a few times where the dialogue, though ultimately vague, does hint in an adult direction. For instance:
 - p.1 Mr. Reece: (picking up the microphone) "Oh, it's working! I'm never awfully sure what to do with these things. I remember I was in Lytham St Annes. . . .had to have it surgically removed. . . . waving it about. . . finally stuck it up the front of his. . . and naturally you couldn't hear a word he said."
 - p.23 Caller's Voice: "Is it all right to use the word, "sit-upon"?"
 - p.31 Mrs. Dilber: ". . . pick up a penny and fell in a pile of dog. . . "
- p.2 Gordon: "My sister-in-law can't sit there for forty-five minutes. She's got a swelling."
- A reference to an accident at a supermarket involving 27 shopping carts. P.4 Mercedes: "It's Mrs. Van den berg I feel sorry for. She was on the operating table five hours having that tin of corned beef removed. And for what? Because I can't see her mounting a lawn mower again."
- p.11 Mercedes, as Cratchit: "Flipping heck."
- p.12 Thelma, as Scrooge: (making tea) "Every idiot who goes about with "Merry Christmas" on his lips should be boiled with is own pudding, and buried with a holly through his heart. One lump or two?"
- p.12 Fred invites Scrooge to his house for Christmas. "Shall we say one o'clock for cocktails?"
- p.13 Scrooge: "Shut up."
- p.34 Ghost: (talking to audience) "While I think of it: are there any strong men out there who'd like to do some humping after the show? Any takers? We've got to unscrew all the seats because the ball room dancers are coming in tomorrow. I'm only planning ahead, Thelma!" (I can't find the British definition of Humping, but it's obviously a pun, playing the sexual meaning and also meaning heaving work/lifting. This might get cut from our production though.)

Set Design by Mark Lund



Taproot Theatre Company

Taproot Theatre Company is a professional, nonprofit theatre company with a multi-faceted production program. Founded in 1976, they serve the Pacific Northwest with Mainstage Productions, Touring Productions and Acting Studio. Taproot exists to create theatre that explores the beauty and questions of life while bringing hope to our search for meaning.

Costume Designs

by Sarah Gordon

Mercedes, Act 1



We are so glad you are joining Taproot Theatre for a student matinee performance. Audience Etiquette is important for everyone to experience an enriching and educational experience. See you at the performance!

Audience Etiquette

- It is appropriate to talk quietly until the performance begins.
- If you need to use the restroom, please do so before the performance begins. Restrooms are located in the upper and lower lobbies.
- Be sure to be seated before the performance begins
- No food, gum, candy or beverages are to be brought into the theatre.
- Please don't wear headphones during the performance.
- Please turn off watch alarms, cellular phones, and other electronic devices.
- Students who disturb other members of the audience may be asked to leave the theatre and wait in the lobby.
- Remember: you will get an opportunity to talk with the actors and director at the end of the performance. Be prepared with questions about the production!
- Please stay out of the aisles (also called "voms") during the performance.
- Enjoy the Show!